



Update, the newsletter of the African Burial Ground and Five Points Archaeological Projects, is published by the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground (OPEI), at 6 World Trade Ctr., Rm. 239, New York, NY 10048. Our telephone number is (212) 432-5707. Please send all e-mail inquiries to: nyabg@worldnet.att.net. *Update* provides current information about New York City's African Burial Ground and its historical context. This publication is made possible with funds provided by the U.S. General Services Administration under contract number 2PCB-CM-97-0154.

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and more

A Letter From the U.S. General Services Administration

15 January, 1999

Dear Friends of the African Burial Ground:

The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) is fully committed to the African Burial Ground Project and has consistently acted in the public interest to meet its obligations to support this National Historic Landmark as directed by Congress.

In 1991, the GSA agreed with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) to "make available an amount not to exceed one percent of the estimated construction cost of (290 Broadway) to implement data recovery and mitigation." The agency also agreed that "after review and comment on the research design by the (ACHP) and the (New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission), GSA shall ensure that the plan is implemented." GSA and the ACHP signed an Amendment to the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) stipulating both these points.

GSA calculates its current and planned expenditures for data recovery and mitigation at more than \$15 million. Subtracting the \$3 million which Congress directed the agency to set aside for memorialization, and the additional \$1 million GSA has budgeted to support memorialization, the agency has spent nearly \$12 million on data recovery and mitigation. This is nearly four times the "not-to-exceed" amount stipulated in the agreement between GSA and the ACHP. There are no specific appropriations from Congress for this project: all of the money spent to date has come out of GSA's regular budget and is taken from existing programs. These expenditures constitute an extraordinary level of Federal support for this unique undertaking.

GSA will be meeting with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to assess the agency's mitigation efforts to date, and define further requirements per the MOA, as amended.

(Continued on page 13)

"The quest for reparations has a long and deeply rooted history in the life and struggles of the African American community" - Robert L. Allen, *Black Scholar Magazine*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 1998.

African Burial Ground Update: Status of the Archaeological Investigation

Jean Howson, Ph.D.

We have come a very long way since the archaeological excavation and building construction began simultaneously back in the Spring of 1991, thanks to a community that insisted on taking control. Thanks also goes to Dr. Blakey, without whom the Project would not exist. I have been involved with the Project in various ways, but in the past year in particular, I've been working closely with Dr. Warren Perry, Director of Archaeology for the Project. I want to start by touching on where archaeological analysis fits into the overall project, then turn to some specifics of the work we are doing.

What exactly do we mean when we talk about the "archaeological investigation" of the African Burial Ground? Although all of the team on the Project work closely together and share overarching goals, we have special areas of technical expertise. Biological anthropologists and geneticists study the human remains, and historians examine written documents which survive from the period when the cemetery was used.

As archaeologists, our particular technical expertise is in excavating remains, recording their exact location and positions. We identify all material items other than the human bones, figuring out how they got where we found them, dating this material, dating burials, and looking for patterns in the spatial arrangement of burials.

Beyond all of these things, though, we seek to understand the cultural meanings represented by material remains. When people bury their dead, their actions are filled with

meanings such as their relationship with the person who has died, their new relationship with that person's spirit, maintaining connections with others who went before (the ancestors), beliefs about how to assist in the transition of death by proper handling and placement of the body, as well as beliefs about the spiritual properties of objects and symbols.

Knowing this, we the archaeologists start by assuming that everything that was dug up at this site potentially can tell us something about the African people who lived and died in New York during the colonial and early national period.

We employ many specific methods for using the raw data of archaeology to gather information about people in the past. To begin with, we could not just look at the artifacts that were excavated as if they existed in isolation and speculate on their meanings, any more than we can look at the human remains as though they came from a scientific lab rather than a cemetery. We needed first to conceptually "reconstruct" the cemetery, meaning recreate on paper and on computers that which was destroyed through excavation. While the records from the field work, which include notes, drawings and photographs, show how each burial looked, we need to piece together the records, review them minutely, and cross-check all notes in order to understand a number of important things, including: 1) how burials were related to each other in space, 2) whether some of the items which came to us in storage

boxes or sitting in the display cases had been deliberately placed in the grave, on the grave, or accidentally found their way into the grave fill, 3) disturbances to burials which took place after burial, 4) and patterns of coffin types, body orientation, burial depth, and density of burials across the site.

All of this is part of establishing what we call "archaeological context" for everything we have. It is one of the essential steps we have to take if we want to go further toward understanding the actions and beliefs that resulted in what we find archaeologically. We are currently nearing completion of the very basic task of accurately relating burials and items within vertical and horizontal space and recording all of that information on computer.

It is one thing to have information in a computer, but our goals for both further analysis and for presenting the reconstruction of the African Burial Ground to others call for graphic display as well. We are currently involved in the task of mapping the African Burial Ground using Computer Aided Design and Drafting, or CADD. This work has required, and will continue to require many, many hours of painstaking work.

The two-dimensional mapping of the burials is nearing completion. Staff working at the CADD laboratory under the direction of Dr. Robert Bethea at Howard University and archaeologists working in New York are sending the maps back and forth for editing and corrections. Ruth Mathis, a member of the New York archaeological staff has been able to spend a week at

Howard working closely with the CADD staff to make sure the archaeological information is clearly presented and consistent. Remaining work includes incorporating the drawings and photographs of the human remains into the CADD maps, "placing" all artifacts determined to be burial-related into the maps, and adding the vertical dimension so that our final computer graphics will be three-dimensional. Since the existing hand-drawn site maps do not include depths, one thing we have been doing is going back to field notes. With the help of our computer program, we have calculated absolute elevations (measurements above sea level) for points on each burial, coffin, and, where available, the artifacts.

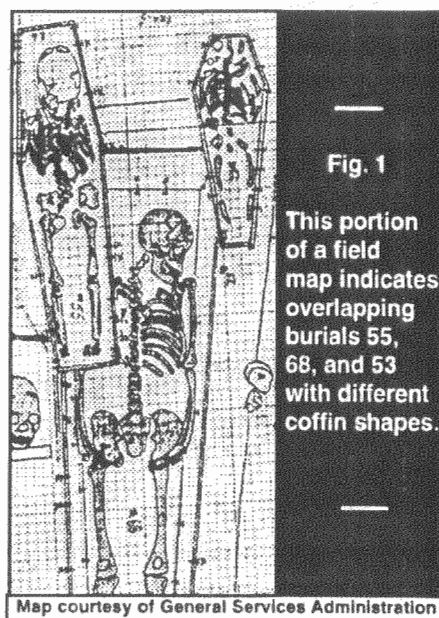
Again, this very basic, and painstaking task is nearing completion. I should point out that we don't always have the information we would like in order to create accurate 3-dimensional renderings of burials. Ideally in the future, people will be able to sit at a computer screen and view the burial ground as though from above, and then move beneath the surface to see it in cross section. This will take time and money, and we hope it becomes a reality.

Before moving on I want to explain one of the reasons we are being so careful in our analysis of the burials in space and in relation to each other. Since this cemetery was used over many generations, one of the main goals of the Project is to shed light on changes which took place within the community and culture of New York City's early African population.

We are trying to develop a "periodization" for the African Burial Ground-- that is group the burials into early, middle, and late, or at least two groups, early and late-- to see if we can detect changes over time. Change over time may show up in terms of health patterns,

physical quality of life, places of origin, the demographic structure of the community (numbers of men, women, and children and their ages) and of course, burial practices.

But the time factor is extremely difficult to assign. This is because the bones themselves cannot be dated, but most of the artifacts can be dated to a very long time span. Therefore, rather than dating individual burials we need to establish sequences of burials by looking at their relationships in vertical and horizontal space, then see what kinds of differences correspond to earlier and later burials.



Just as an example, if the burials underneath tend to have one shape of coffin and the burials on top, which must have been placed in the ground at least a bit later, tend to have another shape, this may mean a change in style over time (see Fig. 1 above), which in turn would allow us to assign burials to earlier or later groups. Or perhaps such a pattern will emerge in terms of a physical difference, such as disease indicators. We can then ask what such time related differences mean in terms of how the enslaved and free Africans in New York lived their lives and dealt with death.

Several of us are working on this question of what we call "relative-dating," and I'd like to mention in particular an important member of the Project team. Dr. Augustin Holl is an African scholar of archaeology who originally hails from Cameroons and is currently at the University of California in San Diego. One of Dr. Blakey's goals in putting together this team was to have Africanists as well as Americanist archaeologists, and Dr. Holl has brought us an important African perspective as well as methods he has developed for analysis of space and time at cemetery sites.

Turning now to another of the ways that digging in the dirt helps provide information about past people's lives, I want to briefly fill you in on the status of soil samples which were taken from each burial. Since we did not do the excavations ourselves, we do not always know exactly where each of the thousand or so bags of soil which were stored in the lab came from. But in most cases, some soil was taken from immediately above the coffin lid and some was sampled from the place where a person's stomach or sometimes bowel contents would have been.

Once we recorded in the computer all of the samples according to where they had been taken from, we were ready to have various kinds of scientific analysis done on them. Three basic types of analysis were chosen: 1) Macro-plant analysis. Fairly large soil samples were put through a flotation process and charred seeds and other plant remains floated to the surface of a tank. They were then collected for microscopic identification. These remains may have been from plants which grew in the cemetery, from plants placed in a grave, or from incompletely digested food in a person's stomach. 2) Pollen analysis. Pollen grains were extracted from small samples of soil and analyzed.

Pollen is normally present in soil from plants which are naturally-occurring in an area, but may also be from plants placed in a grave, or ingested prior to death, 3) Parasitology. Small samples of soil were examined for remains of microscopic parasites found in the human body.

Last year, pilot studies were done, using a selection of burials in order to determine which kinds of analysis might prove most successful in producing new information. The macro-plant study and the pollen study done by our sub-consultants produced results which are interesting and hold further promise, while the parasitological pilot study failed to produce results.

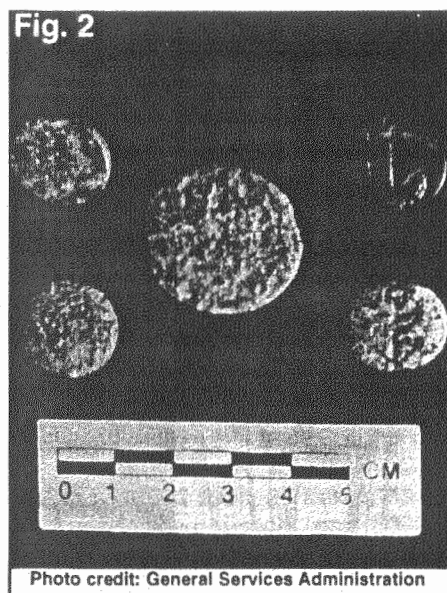
Dr. Perry is now in the process of selecting a larger group of burials for these specialized studies. The selection will be based on a number of criteria which are being refined, including age, sex, and health attributes, as well as burial placement within the cemetery, coffin type, the presence of artifacts, and so forth.

Turning now to artifacts. First a system had to be implemented where artifact information could be recorded in a way that related to all other burial information. That system is in place now, and the artifact analysis proceeds. I should explain that thus far we have only examined those artifacts which underwent conservation after they were excavated. This would include only items which were thought to have been deliberately placed with an individual's body, or in some cases, metal objects thought to have decorated coffins. I have learned that we will shortly receive the report from Project conservators which will contain basic descriptive information on these materials and on the treatment they received.

We have barely begun our examination of all of the thousands of items which were recovered else-

where, such as from grave surfaces or grave shaft fill, nor has the coffin hardware (nails, screws and tacks) been examined thoroughly. As of today we have not received the go-ahead to proceed with this work.

Another of the archaeologists on the team, Dr. Leonard Bianchi, has already reexamined most of the items treated by the conservators. Minute examination is essential for some items, because we are interested in the meanings of even the smallest details of style. Let's look at one example:



Five buttons came from one man's grave (see Fig. 2 above). Two of them were decorated with anchors, and previously some people have interpreted this as a man buried in the uniform of a British naval officer. But only 2 of the five are anchor-decorated, and in fact, looking at them more closely, it is clear that even these two do not match. This was not a uniform. Nor can we even say for certain that the buttons represented a jacket.

We are also determining, to the extent we can, exactly where items were found within burials so that we can make determinations as to their actual placement at the time

of interment and so that they can be represented on our maps and drawings. For example the waist and wrist beads, an African style of adornment, found with the woman labeled Burial 340 were drawn in detail before removing them from the ground. Other artifacts however, were recorded in a more cryptic fashion in the field notes and we need to reconstruct their actual placement.

Beads for instance, can be worn strung as jewelry or sewn to cloth, or may be components of charms or collections of items with magic properties. These possibilities need to be examined based on exactly how and where they were found on the remains. Buttons, likewise, can be found on clothing, strung as pendants, or used in charms, and we need to consider all possibilities.

Shroud pins, when recovered (often they were too decayed and appeared only as greenish stains in the soil), do not just need to be identified, they need to be recorded as to the exact location if at all possible, since this can tell us about which individuals were wrapped and how people were wrapped or clothed for burial. Different ways of treating the dead, may reflect ethnic differences. For example, culture specific views about the destination of spirits of children who die, may reflect change over time, or other factors such as relative poverty, family connections and so forth.

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Part II of this article will continue in the Spring issue of Update with a focus on coffins and coffin hardware from an archaeological and historical perspective. Also to be discussed is the comparative research of burial sites in Elmina and Jamaica.

To find out Who's Who on the African Burial Ground Project see page 13 of this issue.

AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND PROJECT VOLUNTEER

Allison Manfra

Wajeedah Anderson Beyah has been a devoted volunteer with the Office of Public Education and Interpretation (OPEI) since 1997. She recalls learning of the African Burial Ground through Chadra Pittman, a Public Educator at OPEI. She met Chadra during a Mothers Against Violence Program at the African Burial Ground where Wajeedah read her poems surrounded by mothers who had experienced the loss of a loved one. This mother of five children recognized the importance of the Burial Ground as proof of the African contribution to the construction of New York. At the Mothers Against Violence Program, Wajeedah realized the necessity of incorporating the African Burial Ground into the classroom. "Once a person knows where they come from," says Wajeedah, "then the violence will stop."

Wajeedah, a Queens resident, is a poet and educational consultant. She has been writing poetry for more than thirty years, and describes her work as motivational, historical and informative. She is a spiritual writer, who, she says, has not forgotten her grassroots.

Her work is intended to inform the community about the necessity of reforming the school system, and Wajeedah believes her poetry is a means of communicating her views interestingly and effectively. She discusses issues such as school uniforms, classroom size, and safety in schools at public hearings and community meetings. A former poetry teacher for tenth and eleventh graders, Wajeedah has done numerous poetry readings for fashion shows, churches, schools and other organizations, and has been profiled in articles in publications such as the New York Times, The Harlem Newsletter, Arts and Sciences, and the Cornerstone, among others.



Wajeedah Anderson Beyah
Photo credit: Allison Manfra

Upon meeting Chadra at the Mothers against Violence March, Wajeedah acquired African Burial Ground literature and made her presence known at several OPEI events. She admits feeling awe at the spiritual site of the African Burial Ground, and encourages people she meets in the community to visit the site and the OPEI. She feels positive energy from the OPEI staff, and believes the people working for the project are inspirational. Her positive experiences at the OPEI, and the true history of Africans in New York, as implicated by the rediscovery of the Burial Ground, are factors which contribute to Wajeedah's interest in the project.

As an OPEI volunteer, Wajeedah distributes information about the project to school officials, teachers, politicians, and children. She carries African Burial Ground brochures and fact sheets in her bag, and never hesitates to share this material with anyone she comes in contact with at civic meetings and in her travels. She distributes this material throughout the city, and encourages the people she meets to contact the OPEI.

Wajeedah is passionate about education and the safety of children. She feels the African Burial Ground enables children to recognize their history, and this knowledge can diminish the aggression and frustration children feel at school. There are some individuals who, according to Wajeedah, do not acknowledge the history and legacy of Africans in New York. Children learn very little about the true history of New York, and this, says Wajeedah, may be the cause of violence, misunderstanding, and lack of ambition among children. Wajeedah, when speaking to children in her travels, encourages them to take the OPEI material to their teachers.

She advocates incorporating the history of Africans in New York and the African Burial Ground into educational curricula. It is for this reason that she has passed African Burial Ground material on to Dr. Rudy Crew, the Chancellor of the City of New York Board of Education. By incorporating this information into the curriculum, the people of the community will be more understanding to their neighbors, and children will be less likely to contribute to violence. Teachers will realize the history and legacy of Africans in New York, and the children will realize the contributions of their ancestors in the construction of New York.

Wajeedah views the African Burial Ground as a historical and spiritual site where all people can feel the spirit of the ancestors and the future. She believes this insight can bring people together. Her dedication and accomplishment as a volunteer are vital to the success of the African Burial Ground Project. It is this very dedication which is so important to the future of the Project.



Learn more about the African Burial Ground as a Volunteer or as a Student Intern -- OPEI is currently accepting applications for College Interns for the Summer of 1999

November 26, 1998 -- Martia Goodson, Ph.D.

By the time I re-entered the lobby we had enough people to form a circle around the cosmogram and have our ritual: moments of silence, tributes and an announcement of upcoming plans to monitor the treatment of the African Burial Ground Project. By this time, the rains had stopped and we moved out to the site and helped each other put up flowers. We poured libation again, and said our goodbyes. We all understood that we will be back next year. Thanks to Dr. Wilson and her staff, the volunteers and supporters of the African Burial Ground Project.



Please submit your name and/or corrections to: OPEI, 6 World Trade Ctr., U.S. Custom House, Rm. 239, New York, New York 10048

THE MOST COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT

THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND

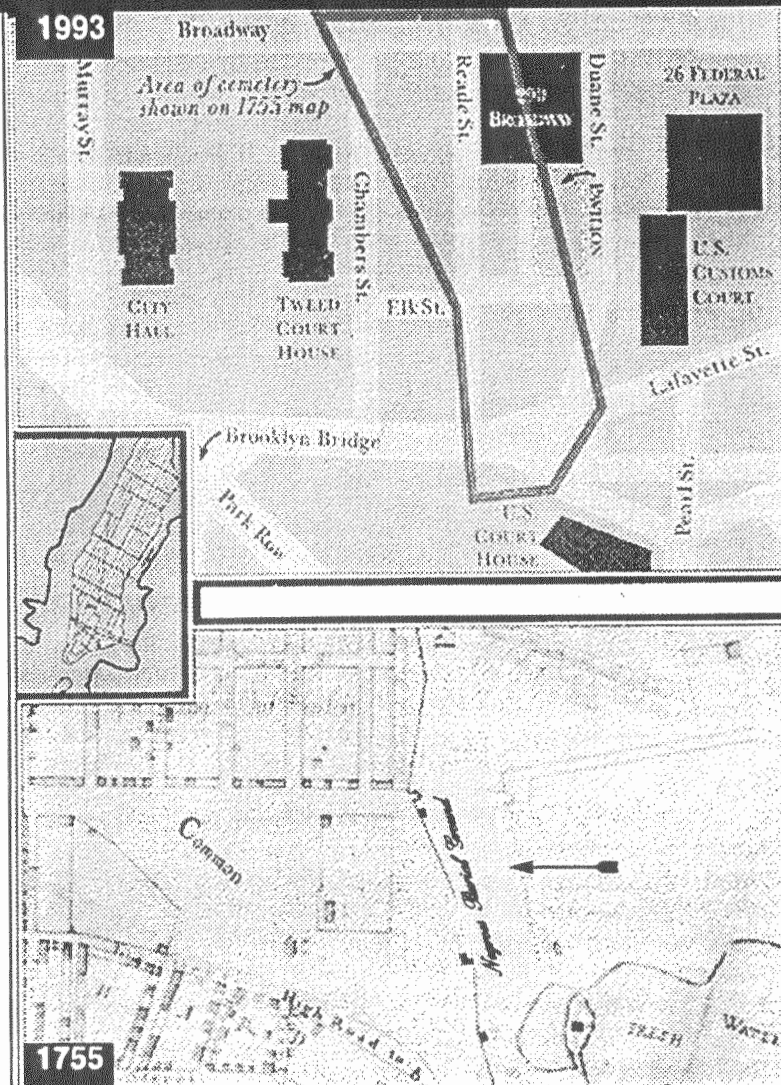
Sherill D. Wilson, Ph.D.

Thousands of questions continue to be raised by scholars, educators, young people, parents, grandparents, students and many others about the history, physical analysis of the ancestral remains, politics, preservation efforts, commemoration and memorialization, and a variety of related topics on the subject of the New York African Burial Ground.

Those questions are routinely channeled to the appropriate project researchers allowing for an interactive relationship between the OPEI public education team, the broad audiences served by the OPEI and the Project's principal investigators and directors. This new column in the Update newsletter is an effort to share with the Update readership some of those questions and answers. We welcome your questions, letters, comments and e-mail.

1. Who advises the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) about issues that concern the African American Community and the African Burial Ground?

In response to the initial community outrage (1991-1992) over what was viewed as the desecration (excavation) of the sacred and long forgotten 18th century African Burial Ground, a Federal Steering Committee (FSC) was formed to advise the GSA on the concerns of the New York African descendant community. This committee was established following a public hearing held in July of 1992 in New York City by former U.S. Congressman Gus Savage. Three million dollars was also allocated by the U.S. Congress to memorialize the national and city landmark African Burial Ground Site.



Savage adjourned the hearing with a reprimand to the GSA: "I am not going to be a part of your disrespecting what people here have testified — scholars have called — the most important archaeological discovery in this century! What I'm going to do — Gus Savage — is everything in my power to make you change your obstinacy and your disrespect for a sector of this city, and with that having been said, this committee is adjourned." Many of these committee members had served on a Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on the African Burial Ground during the Dinkins administration.

The FSC served a two year tenure from 1992 to 1994. It was chaired by Howard Dodson, Schomburg Chief and Peggy King Jorde, now Project Executive for Memorialization, served as Executive Director. The membership included Laurie Beckelman, then Commissioner of the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), New York State Senator David Paterson, the late Dr. John Henrik Clarke and violinist Noel Pointer, along with other New York historians, museum heads, as well as members of the descendant community. Prior to its dissolution in 1994, the FSC submitted a detailed plan for site preservation and commemoration to the U.S. Congress and the GSA.

The FSC was, despite public protest, disbanded by the GSA upon completion of the two year tenure.

At this writing, no community group or organization advises the GSA on any aspect of the African Burial Ground Project. A "National Management Team" consisting of GSA management personnel have met on occasion with Project Directors and select consultants. A number of individual scholars and professionals, most of whom are African American, advise the GSA on the Interpretive Center to be installed in 290 Broadway and the Exterior Memorial installation being planned for the preserved portion of the African Burial Ground Site at Duane Street and Republican Alley.

2. How big was the original African Burial Ground and why was only a portion saved?

Based on historical maps and documents (see page 7), the original African Burial Ground is believed to be approximately 6 acres in size, about 5 current day city blocks. *The African Burial Ground is bounded by Duane Street (north), Broadway (west), City Hall Park (south) and Centre Street (east).* Much of the cemetery today lays underneath buildings along Reade and Chamber Streets and Broadway. Human remains have been routinely uncovered along Chambers Street and in City Hall Park.

Racial identification of these remains have yet to be determined. Much of the aforementioned property is owned by the City of New York and private owners. The northern most portion of the African Burial Ground is where temporary commemorative signage was installed by the GSA. The signage was collectively authored by the former Federal Steering Committee.



→→→ LETTERS TO THE EDITOR →→→

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

The dramatic historical and social significance of the early research findings produced by Dr. Blakey's team was conveyed in a profound manner at the November 21, 1998 presentations in New York. Clearly, continuation of this line of research deserves additional support, since resolution of basic questions regarding the history of slavery in this nation hangs in the balance. But there are additional dimensions of significance to the African Burial Ground (ABG) Project that deserve consideration in any discussion of future support.

The genetic component of the ABG Project stands out as an exemplary grassroots initiative undertaken by citizens to assert control over genomic research. In an age where citizens have been largely shut out of decision-making about government-sponsored mega-science initiatives such as the Human Genome Project, the New York descendant community's struggle to influence the course of genomic science stands as an important and inspiring symbol of hope that other genetic research programs can be

brought under the umbrella of democratic decision-making in the future.

Best Regards,
Gordon Mitchell
Assist. Professor of
Communications
University of Pittsburgh, PA.

Alafia,
I am fascinated by the discovery of the ancient burial ground with the remains of my ancestors. I am especially interested in the genetic anthropology being done, tracing what areas of Africa different individuals originated from. I believe the genetics should be extended to include the living descendants of Africans in America, to trace what parts of Africa we came from. I would be the first in line for this testing. The answers will solve many historical mysteries and give us a sense of identity.

Kwame Ayamu
Cleveland, Ohio

(See Community Voices p. 12 for additional comments regarding Howard University's scientific research)

Words to Live By

Martin Luther King, Jr.
1929-1968

"True Peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice."

"The straitjackets of race prejudice and discrimination do not wear only Southern labels. The subtle, psychological technique of the North has approached, in its ugliness and victimization of the Negro, the outright terror and open brutality of the South."

"There is nothing that expressed massive civil disobedience any more than the Boston Tea Party, and yet we give this to our young people and our students as part of the great tradition of this nation. So I think we are in good company when we break unjust laws, and I think those who are willing to do it and accept the penalty are those who are part of saving the nation."

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream."



Who's Who in the African Burial Ground Project

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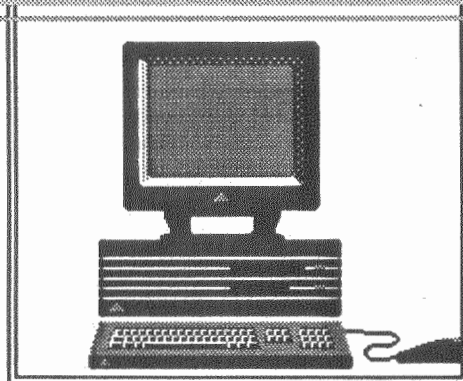
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**QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS ABOUT
THE PROJECT?
SEND E-MAIL TO:
nyabg.worldnet.att.net**

Community Voices



Compiled by Donna Harden Cole
and Chadra D. Pittman

In the Fall 1998 issue of Update, we published an open letter to the community from Dr. Michael L. Blakey, Project and Scientific Director for the African Burial Ground. His letter outlined how scientific goals, such as DNA testing, are being undermined by the General Services Administration's decision to stop funding, and cited their attempts to compromise Project leadership. What are your thoughts or comments on this issue?

**Dorothy Hibbert, Ph.D., Adjunct Professor
College of New Rochelle, N.Y.**

Dr. Michael L. Blakey, the Project and Scientific Director for the African Burial Ground has discovered some interesting facets in the history of enslaved Africans. He has opened up the possibility of descendants tracing their ancestry to specific areas in Nigeria, Niger, Senegal and Benin. For many Europeans this link to West African states will challenge the assertion of being an unidentified and nameless people who were brought to the Americas. It would change the equation in a way which would be upsetting to many Euro-Americans. Now it would be possible to reunite many families after five hundred years.

In addition, Dr. Blakey's research has uncovered the fact that there was a very high mortality rate among adolescent girls and women. This supports our thesis that slavery was a cruel and dehumanizing institution. The statistics refute the claim of those who say that enslavers were kind to their enslaved Africans. How kind could you be when new arrivals died in such extraordinary numbers?

Another interesting piece of information has surfaced in reference to the enslaved African children. His research has uncovered the surprising fact that children born in Africa lived healthier lives than those born in New York. This research is disconcerting to those Euro-Americans who want to believe that slavery rescued Africans. Dr. Blakey now states that slavery increased the morbidity of African children. It is certainly a blow to the long held belief that American slavery improved our children's health and welfare.

In conclusion, our enslaved ancestors introduced vaccinations to the Americas. This bit of information is the last straw. The enslaved Africans brought medical knowledge which was responsible for saving both European and African lives. It appears that our ancestors were ahead of their enslavers in the practice of medicine. Vaccination is the foremost tool being used to combat deadly diseases which decimated populations five hundred years ago. It was our ancestors who made this contribution to civilization. All of us need to thank Dr. Michael Blakey and his staff for their research which must be continued until its planned completion.

O. Diane Adebawale

Higher Education Administrative Assistant, CUNY

The painstaking research that Dr. Michael L. Blakey is conducting on the remains of our African ancestors who lived in colonial New York is valuable beyond measure. The importance of this project cannot be over emphasized. All New Yorkers and all Americans need to know the results of his findings.

Such a laborious undertaking cannot be accomplished without the financial support outlined at the outset of the project some seven years ago. We are just a year away from the projected date of reinterment of our people's remains. Funding must not now be withdrawn. Project leadership should not now become a dividing line. The original and primary focus of his efforts must be kept at hand. Time cannot be wasted on distractions of this sort.

As, with God's help, Dr. Blakey is doing his part, the General Services Administration is duty bound to do their part as well. Yes, we are speeding forth towards the 21st century in a changing and almost unrecognizable world. A world where truth, honesty and trust are difficult to define and even harder to experience. Not so with Dr. Blakey and his team. They are honestly searching for the truth and we can trust them wholeheartedly to find and share it with us. A promise is still a promise. With integrity and selflessness, Dr. Blakey is keeping his promise. The General Services Administration should certainly do the same.

**Barbara Muniz, Founder and President
Black American Roots Society**

This is just a wake up call. We haven't been lulled to sleep with the sweet sounds of promises, our eyes and minds are open and alert. Because we've won a few important battles in this war of history not repeating itself, the battle has not been won yet.

We are standing at the threshold of uncovering the hidden truth about our ancestors that lived and died in New York during the colonial era. The truth will put us ahead, because when you know who you are and where you've been, you have a clear direction, of where you're going. Don't give away the house just because the wolf is outside huffing and puffing and saying, "I'll blow your house down." We are doing good work and we won't come down.

With all the new technology that is being used to test and prove DNA in genetic cell comparison, it is vitally important that this testing take place in this Project. As a concerned member of the grassroots community who has been involved in the rediscovery of the African Burial Ground from its early beginnings, I recall there were many of us who stressed the importance of the spiritual significance of this Project, only to be told how important the scientific part of this Project would be in determining genetic heredity. Now let's not change in the middle of the stream, if we must go back out into the streets by marching or protesting that the government must keep its word, then so be it. Peaceful and successful demonstrations we know how to do. →

We're not asking for welfare, if necessary we can support our own, just check our history.

**Reverend Mother Khoshhali,
Interfaith Wisdom Service**

The United States can no longer ignore African and African American history, historical relics, artifacts, and human remains (skeletons and coffins!!!). Neither can we throw the bones back into the ground and "act like nothing ever happened." Historical and DNA research must always continue to tell stories of what went on before: the tragedies, accomplishments, disease, health habits, economic conditions and living standards, and lineage of the past. The government must trust the judgement of the present researchers, especially when it comes to reburial in the year 2,000.

Research is not a one-time, ten year project. It is an ongoing process as all researchers know. Continued U.S. government funding of this historic project would be one of the ways the U.S. and the British could begin to compensate for the enslavement of human beings from the continent of Africa, the West Indies and South America. Other races and cultures have been, and still continue to be, adequately compensated by the U.S. taxpayer's money for the mutilations, destructions, and repressions of their race and/or culture. Japanese people have been compensated for the atomic bomb destruction caused by the U.S.; the holocaust of the Jewish race under the regime of Hitler has been (still continues to be) compensated financially; and under former President Carter, they were able to build a memorial site that can house their pictures, artifacts, and other important historical information for the viewing of the peoples of today and the generations of tomorrow.

These historical sites are also necessary to: give recognition and respect to the free and enslaved peoples who labored and suffered in order that others might live free, easy, and abundant lives. If the past behavior of the enslaver is not to be tolerated and repeated, and if the present people are truly "sorry" for the inhuman treatment of the African peoples by the American and British peoples, then we must continue the research and continue to be funded by the public through the U.S. taxpayer's money.

The African Burial Ground Project should give first consideration to qualified researchers and historians of African descent especially in these days when there are many qualified researchers available. These are the ones who have a personal interest in preserving their history. For the history of America, African peoples, future generations, and for the respect of buried freed and enslaved Africans, a decent memorial building should always be maintained! In due time I am sure government funding will still be there, but it will be less and less -- due to their "priorities" and non-personal interest. We need to make affluent Africans and African Americans more responsible and accountable for the preservation of their history, which they should take on with pride and enthusiasm! Peace and Blessings,

Brother Sayeed Samad

African Burial Ground Volunteer and Community Activist

In the name of God, the most Merciful and the most Mercy Giving!!! I thank OPEI, your newsletter and its readers for the opportunity to express my views about this very important issue. Dr. Blakey in his open letter very accurately restates the policy and fiscal challenges that face too many non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations in our community and the developing countries, globally. Most important about these challenges to our physical and psychic developmental vehicles, like OPEI and the African Burial Ground, is our understanding of these challenges and our response to them.

One of the patterns that I've noticed over time, is that the more important an organization is to me and my "family," the more barriers there are to a stable budget, the more fragile the organization becomes and the more prone it is to destruction. Why destroy OPEI and the archaeological forensics of the African Burial Ground? Simply to keep in the "dark" what was not done in the "light" of American culture - racism and oppression in the midst of the then new "democracy."

I recommend that our response is not beyond our means, and the strategy should be a mix of options, including: funding on all varieties of governmental levels, private corporations, the general public, wealthy benefactors like celebrities, special interest groups like physicians seeking knowledge of the archaeological background to maladies afflicting contemporary African America, well planned special events, and in-kind or other than monetary donations.

Some structural considerations should include: the recruitment of grantsmanship experts already among us that we too often under appreciate, the upgrade of some of our volunteers to the status of unpaid professionals when possible and their inclusion as a budget line item, the understanding that a "campaign" is another level of warfare and an analysis of how the African Burial Ground affects various groups of people emotionally.

On our side, we have tremendous leverage: the GSA, our governmental servants using our tax monies, should be constantly reminded that their officers are unethically reneging on a set of negotiated issues from 1993. This allowed the continued construction of the federal office building at the site of the African Burial Ground, the cessation of interference from, and the resulting support from the "descendant community" on this important sacred real estate.

The question I ask in return is, what do we value, what are the values that you and I share and is the "house" of our value system in order? If the answer to these questions are positive, then the implementation of our solutions will not be far behind. Peace and Peace-out to our workers and strivers at OPEI.





African Burial Ground Update

Compiled by OPEI Staff

□ WORLD MONUMENTS WATCH

The landmark New York African Burial Ground Site has recently been nominated for inclusion on the 2000-2001 World Monuments Fund, World Monuments Watch List of 100 Most Endangered Sites. The African Burial Ground was nominated by the National Association for African American Heritage Preservation, and sponsored by the Schomburg Research Center. **For information contact Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson at OPEI (212) 432-5707.**

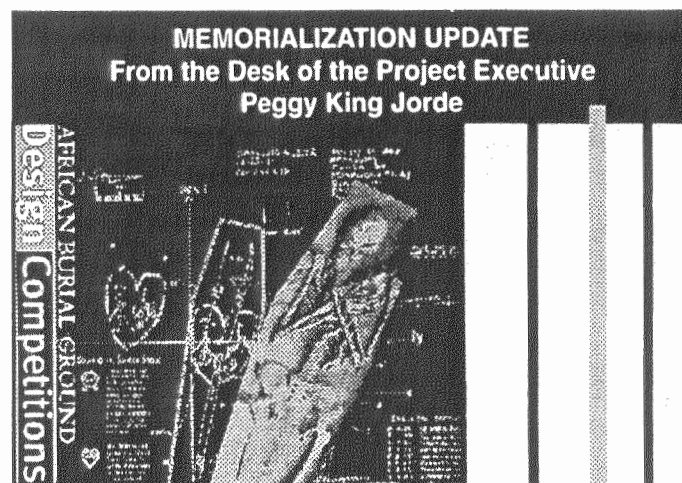
□ AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND COMMEMORATIVE STAMP CAMPAIGN CONTINUES.

In an effort to renew our attempts to see the African Burial Ground commemorated by the issuance of a series of postal stamps, the OPEI and the African Burial Ground Volunteers urge all African Burial Ground Project supporters to continue to collect signatures that will be submitted to the U.S. Postal Service in the summer of 1999. At this writing 134,773 signatures have been collected from 41 U.S. states and 25 countries and territories abroad. We have already submitted 85,000 signatures to the U.S. Postal Services Stamp Committee which reflects local, national and international support for the commemoration of the African Burial Ground. Our goal is to submit one million signatures attesting to the lives and contributions of African men, women and children who were enslaved in 17th, 18th, and 19th century America. Legislators who have submitted letters of support for this commemorative effort are: U.S. Senators Frank Lautenberg and Bill Bradley (both NJ); Congressmen Earle F. Hilliard (7th, AL), Floyd Flake (6th, NY), Eliot Engel (17th, NY), Jerrold Nadler (8th, NY), Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC); NY Senators Nellie Santiago-Fernandez (17), David A. Paterson (29), Martin Connor (25th); NY State Assembly members William Scarborough (29), Edward Griffith (40), Aurelia Greene (77); and New York City Council Members Victor Robles (34) Julia Harrison (20), Walter L. McCaffrey (26), Lloyd Henry (45), Ronnie M. Eldridge (6).

Please return all signed petitions to the OPEI by May 31, 1999. Anyone interested in joining the AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND PROJECT VOLUNTEERS who continue to spearhead this historical effort, **please contact Marie-Alice Devieux at (212) 432-5707** (See page 15 for the 1999 Commemorative Stamp Petition).

□ **VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION.** In recognition of the dedication and exemplary service of the African Burial Ground Volunteers to the people of the United States, and citizens of the world, the collective and select Volunteers of the Year have been nominated to receive the 1999 Presidential Service Awards. The Office of Public Education and

Interpretation (OPEI) has trained nearly 200 individuals from New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia between 1993 and 1998. The individuals nominated for this national honor are Dr. Joseph Jackson, (Recipient of the Volunteer Excellence Award 1995), Rhonda Best, (Volunteer of the Year 1997), Ruth Y. Harden, (Volunteer of the Year, 1998), and Dr. Martia Goodson, (Volunteer of the Year 1998).



□ An Open Invitation to the Community

Thank you all for your ongoing input on the African Burial Ground Memorialization. Your comments, questions, suggestions and constructive criticism continue to make a tremendous impact. In recent months your phone calls, and feedback at public events have had an ongoing theme: how to memorialize the African Burial Ground between now and when the Interpretive Center and Exterior Memorial are installed, and what can members of the community do to help with memorialization?

Some of your feedback inspired us to consider the use of the federal office building's lobby rotunda and corridors which currently house federally funded permanent art installations commemorating the African Burial Ground. A "performance series," held among these art installations, is the type of idea some of you have asked us to consider. With African American Heritage Month rapidly approaching, this seems a particularly intriguing idea. The goals of such a series would be to enhance the African Burial Ground's presence within New York's civic center, encourage greater public visitation, and enable the community to reclaim the site as a "living" memorial. This effort may serve as a form of "pilgrimage" to the site for years to come!

Now we'd like to hear from you again. Please let us know who your community choirs, youth groups, and musicians are. We'll let you know how this idea progresses. Thank you again.

Address inquiries to:

Peggy King Jorde, Project Executive,
26 Federal Plaza, Room 1605, New York, NY 10278;
tel.: 212-264-6949, fax: 212-264-4082,
e-mail: peggy.king-jorde@gsa.gov

(Continued from Page 1)

GSA is pleased to state that each of the three major areas of the African Burial Ground Project (scientific research; public education and outreach; and memorialization) are lead by members of the descendent community. Our three African American consultants currently have over \$9 million in contracts, with an expectation that these contracts will soon exceed \$10 million.

We are fulfilling our commitment to the Federal Steering Committee and to Congress on the following project components:

Interpretive Center. Finalists are expected to be announced this winter and the Center is expected to open in early 2001. GSA has added \$650,000 in further support to this \$1.2 million contract for design and construction.

Exterior Memorial. Outreach on this procurement has been very successful and we have a record number of responses. Finalists are expected to be announced early next year, and the Memorial opening is planned for 2002.

Reinterment. After the Exterior Memorial is in place on the site, the human remains currently undergoing study at Howard University will be returned to New York. The remains will be placed in wooden coffins and then in porous vaults for below ground reinterment, per the recommendations of the Federal Steering Committee. Reinterment is planned for 2,002.

Ceremony. The human remains will be reinterred with appropriate ceremony, per the recommendations of the Federal Steering Committee.

Interior Art. GSA has had competitive procurements for six works of art for the lobby of 290 Broadway. Five of these are already installed and the sixth is expected in Fall 1999.

Howard University has a current contract for \$5.2 million dollars which runs through April 30, 1999. In response to the University's requests, we have given 31 months of extension to what began as one 36-month contract. Since reinterment is not anticipated before 2002, GSA can continue to give Howard University extensions on this current \$5.2 million study of the human remains for at least an additional 18 months.

In May 1998 we asked for detailed proposals on four additional projects which the University has outlined. We look forward to reviewing these proposals when

they arrive. We are currently reviewing a proposal submitted by the University on December 30, 1998 to take over work performed by another contractor. We look forward to continuing our on-going negotiations with Howard University on all aspects of the African Burial Ground research.

Office of Public Education and Interpretation (OPEI). This office has been funded by GSA for six years. GSA has spent almost \$4 million to date on this outreach effort. OPEI's current annual contract is in excess of \$700,000, and we anticipate funding OPEI through the opening of the Interpretive Center, planned for 2001.

The OPEI functions as the agency's public outreach and education program for the Burial Ground, and publishes a quarterly newsletter with general information on the African Burial Ground, as well as updates on the status of the research at Howard University and on the Interpretive Center and Exterior Memorial. The newsletter has a distribution of 15,000 copies internationally. The OPEI's outreach efforts are very successful. In November, for example, they distributed close to 17,000 copies of materials related to the African Burial Ground. And in the last year alone, they gave nearly 13,000 tours, slide presentations and site tours to interested individuals, school and professional groups. In addition to funding the annual OPEI contract, GSA further supports this outreach effort by providing overtime staff and facility services for the forums, open houses and film festivals which the OPEI conducts on weekends.

Project Executive for Memorialization. Ms. Peggy King Jorde has a three year, \$210,000 contract that runs through October 1999.

GSA is proud of our continued commitment to the historic African Burial Ground and looks forward to continuing to fulfill our mitigation and memorialization requirements as dictated by Congress and stipulated in the MOA, as amended.

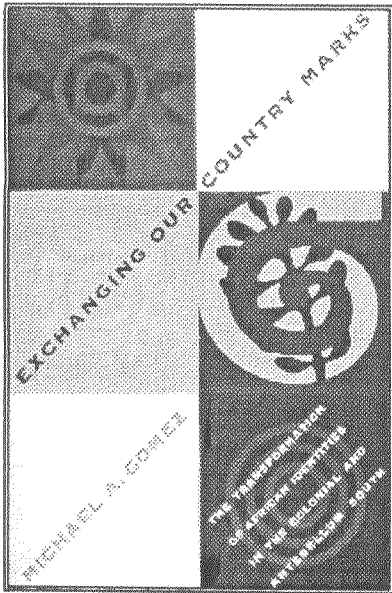
Sincerely,



Thurman M Davis, Sr.,
Deputy Administrator
U.S. General Services Administration

WINTER 1999 OPEI READING LIST

Compiled by
Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D.
& Tamara Jubilee Shaw



Adams, James. Freedom Days: 365 Inspired Moments in Civil Rights History. NY: John Wiley and Sons, Inc. 1998.

Archibald, Rev. Chestina Mitchell. Say Amen: The African American Family's Book of Prayers. NY: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1998.

Austin, Allan D. African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles. NY: Routledge, 1997.

Baker, Jr. Houston A., Manthia Diawara and Ruth H. Lindeborg. Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader. IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996.

Berlin, Ira. Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America. Cambridge, MA.: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1998.

Carson, Clayborne (ed.) The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr. NY: Warner Books, Inc., 1998.

Davis, Ossie & Ruby Dee. With Ossie and Ruby: In This Life Together. NY: William Morrow and Company, Inc. 1998.

Diawara, Manthia. In Search of Africa. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998.

Fabre, Genevieve & Robert O'Meally. History and Memory in African American Culture. NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994.

Gates Jr., Henry Louis & William L. Andrews. Pioneers of the Black Atlantic: Five Slave Narratives from the Age of Enlightenment 1772-1815. Washington, D.C.: Civitas Counterpoint, 1998.

Gomez, Michael A. Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South. N.C.: Univ. of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, 1998.

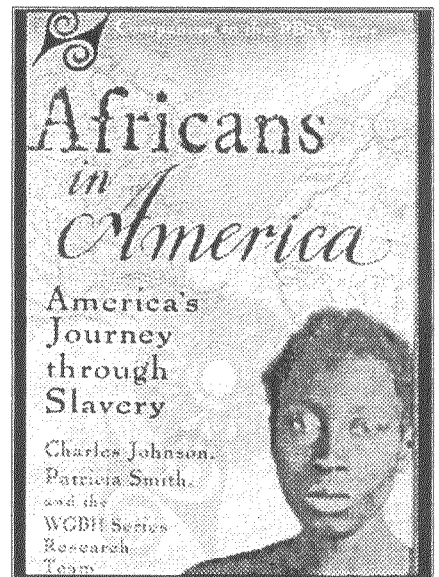
James, Joy (ed.). The Angela Y. Davis Reader. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998.

Johnson, Charles, Patricia Smith & the WGBH Series Research Team. Africans in America: America's Journey Through Slavery. NY: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1998.

Koth, Howard. We Had A Dream: A Tale of Struggle For Integration in America. NY: Simon & Schuster, 1998.

Moore, Christopher & Pamela Johnson. Santa and Pete: A Novel of Christmas Present and Past. NY: Simon and Schuster, 1998.

Sinnette, Elinor Des Verney, W. Paul Coates, & Thomas C. Battle, eds. Black Bibliophiles and Collectors: Preservers of Black History. Howard Univ. Press: Washington, D.C. 1990.



IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF UPDATE

- ▼ Status of the Archaeological Investigation -- Part 2
- ▼ Voices of Old New York
- ▼ 1999 Winners of the African Burial Ground Writing Competition



PETITION FOR AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND COMMEMORATIVE STAMP SERIES STATUS

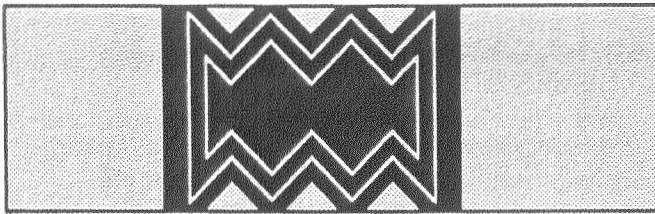
We, the undersigned parties, who are committed to the recognition and preservation of the heritage of Africans and their descendants in the Americas, request that the African Burial Ground in the National Historic District of New York be recommended for the Commemorative Stamp Series status and approval by the Postmaster General.

There is no age requirement to sign the petition

[illegible]

Return to: Office of Public Education and Interpretation
of the African Burial Ground
6 World Trade Center
U.S. Custom House, Rm 239
New York, NY 10048
Tel. (212) 432-5707 Fax (212) 432-5920

Please return as soon as possible.
All petitions must be returned by May 31, 1999



Office of Public Education and Interpretation
of the African Burial Ground
U.S. Custom House
6 World Trade Center, Rm. 239
New York, N.Y. 10048

ADDRESS

